



LECTURES

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No. 2.

ON THE OBJECTS, NATURE, AND STANDARD
OF ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY.

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LECTURE II.

THE OBJECTS, NATURE, AND STANDARD OF ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY.

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Delivered November 28, 1839.

2 COR. iv. 5.—“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake,”—that is, we preach not ourselves as Lords, but we preach Christ Jesus as Lord, and we preach ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.

WHEN our blessed Saviour was arraigned at the bar of Pilate, he openly declared that he was a king, and that he had a kingdom, while, at the same time, he asserted that his kingdom was not of this world. It is quite evident from the general tenor, as well as from many express statements of Scripture, that this kingdom of Christ, though not of the world, was yet to be in the world, and was to consist of an organized society of men, who professed to receive Christ as their Saviour and their King,—to expect spiritual blessings from the use of the ordinances which he had appointed, to feel their obligations to obey all his laws, and who were associated together according to his directions for the attainment of these ends. All the views given us in Scripture of the Church or Kingdom of Christ, plainly imply that it is a society, the members of which, in their common subjection to him as its only head, are united to one another, or associated together in the performance of duties, and in the enjoyment of privileges.

Society, *i. e.*, organized or regulated union, implies superiority on the part of some, and subordination on the part of others, as it is scarcely possible, ordinarily,

that the objects of the union or association of many men, can be fully attained, except by some of its members being vested with a right of superintendence and control, which implies the possession by them of a certain power or authority, and imposes upon the other members of the society a certain obligation to obedience or submission. Accordingly, almost all societies, whatever may be the origin, ground, or objects of their formation, have office-bearers, in whom the ordinary management or control of their affairs is vested. In accordance with this general principle, founded on the light of nature, and sanctioned by the common sense and the ordinary practice of men, there are full and explicit intimations in Scripture, that in Christ's church or kingdom, of which he himself is the only head or lawgiver, there should be government and subordination, office-bearers, who are invested with a certain species and measure of authority, and ordinary members, who are under obligations to render, to a certain extent, submission and obedience. It is this power or authority committed to the office-bearers of the Christian Church, its objects, character, and standard, that we are called upon now to consider; and in doing so, we shall not occupy your time with labouring to prove those doctrines on this subject, which all Presbyterians concur in holding, and which being laid down in the Westminster standards, are maintained not only by all the office-bearers of the Established Church, but by the great body of the Presbyterian Dissenters. Our great object, of course, is to show, that the truths taught in the Word of God, embodied in our standards, and professed by all Scottish Presbyterians, with respect to church power or ecclesiastical authority, do, when rightly understood and fairly applied, afford the fullest warrant for the recent proceedings and present claims of the Church of Scotland.

It is declared in the Westminster Confession, and, of course, is professedly maintained as a Scripture truth by all the office-bearers of our Church, (c. xxx. s. 1,) that "the Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath

therein appointed a government in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate." And this great truth is a part of the sworn creed, not only of all the office-bearers of the Established Church, but of all our Presbyterian Dissenting brethren, both those who have adhered to the original Secession principles, and those who have adopted views opposed to all national establishments of religion; for not only do they all receive this part of the Confession of Faith without limitation, but what is peculiarly deserving of notice, the original Seceders, seeing, even then in the conduct of the prevailing party in our judicatories, plain traces of that monstrous combination of a Popish lording over God's heritage with a spirit of Erastian subjection to civil authority, which so long degraded, and had wellnigh ruined the Church of Scotland, and which, though lately broken and destroyed, some are now striving to re-introduce, inserted in their formula of ordination, the still more full and explicit declaration, that "Jesus Christ, the only king and head of his Church, hath appointed therein a government, distinct from civil government, *and not subordinate* to the same,"—a truth, which with some little variety of expression, not affecting its substantial import, always has been, and still continues to be, a part of the public solemn profession of all who call themselves Seceders.

As, then, this great doctrine, that "the Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government, in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate," both as implying, in opposition to the Erastians, that he has appointed *a distinct* government, and also, in opposition to the Independents, that he has committed the administration of this distinct government, *not to the body of the people, but to church-officers*, that is, to ministers and elders, is one which no office-bearer of the Church of Scotland dare dispute, and which no intelligent Scottish Presbyterian will deny, we shall not dwell on the scriptural evidence on which it rests, but taking its truth as it stands in our Confession

for granted, we shall attempt to explain its true meaning and import, and show its bearing upon the present subjects of contention.

The plain and obvious import of this proposition is, that as there is in a State or commonwealth, government, or a power of direction and control, vesting authority in the magistrate, and imposing an obligation to obey upon the subjects, so there is also in the Church, which had previously been defined on good scriptural grounds, (c. xxv. s. 2,) to “consist of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion together with their children,” a government, or power of regulation and control, distinct from civil government, flowing from Christ as mediator, subject wholly to his control, and vested by him not in magistrates or civil functionaries, but in church-officers, *i. e.*, in ministers and elders. This assertion of a government established by Christ in the Church, in the hand of church-officers, distinct from the civil magistrate, was openly controverted in the Westminster Assembly; and the opposite doctrine, that he had *not* appointed a distinct government, was openly maintained. There seem, indeed, to have been only two ministers so thoroughly Erastian, as to deny that Christ had appointed in his Church a government distinct from the civil, and only one who openly argued against it; but as Baillie, who was one of the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland in that Assembly, tells us, in his Letters, (vol. ii. p. 195,) “the lawyers in the Parliament did blow up the poor man with much vanity, so that he is become their champion to bring out, in the best way he can, Erastian arguments against the proposition, for the contentment of the Parliament.” The Erastian lawyers of that period, being men greatly superior in point of talent and learning to those who have undertaken the defence of the same bad cause in our own day, saw clearly that the whole Erastian controversy turned upon the question, whether or not Christ had appointed in his Church a government distinct from the civil; and having failed in their attempts to persuade the Assembly to reject this

proposition, they exerted their influence in Parliament to prevent its receiving a civil sanction ; and, accordingly, through this Erastian influence, and upon this Erastian ground, the English Parliament refused to give the civil sanction to the thirtieth chapter of the Westminster Confession.*

Some of the Erastian lawyers of our own day have subscribed the Confession as elders ; and none of them can dispute, that the proposition which we are considering, being contained in the Confession, has received the explicit sanction of civil statute in Scotland, and ought therefore to be received as law in the Parliament House as well as in the General Assembly. But being precluded from meeting this proposition, as the old Erastians did, with a direct negative, they have made some feeble and awkward attempts to explain away the meaning of the statement. They have been particularly anxious to *limit* the application of this general position, as they could not but feel, that if Christ has appointed a distinct government in his Church in the hand of his own officers, then, in regard to every thing fairly comprehended in the administration of this government, the interference of any foreign or civil authority is by this appointment, from the very nature of the case, necessarily excluded. It has recently been alleged, that the distinct government which Christ is here said to have appointed in his Church, refers only to the power of inflicting and remitting church censures. But this position is utterly destitute of any foundation in the words used, which naturally and obviously include something more wide and comprehensive, and is inconsistent with the general tenor of the whole statements on the subject in the Confession. † It is certain that this proposition was *intended*, by the Westminster Assembly, to contain a general deliverance on the whole Erastian controversy. This is proved by the express testimony of Baillie, who

* Neal's History of the Puritans, vol. iii. p. 320-1.

† See pp. 99 and 104 of the Dean of Faculty's Letter to the Lord Chancellor, and pp. 67-71 of Mr Dunlop's most admirable, complete, and conclusive "Answer."

makes the following statement regarding it: "Coming upon the article of the Church, and the Church notes, *to oppose the Erastian heresy*, which in this land is very strong, especially among the lawyers, unhappy members of this Parliament, *we find it necessary to say*,"—and then he introduces the position we are at present considering, (vol. ii. p. 195.)

This is plain, also, from the following account of the matter, given in Neal's History of the Puritans, (vol. iii. p. 278): "The first committee was appointed to determine, whether any particular church government was *jure divino*, and to bring their proofs from Scripture. But here they stumbled at the very threshold, for the *Erastians* divided them and entered their dissent; and when the question was put, they withdrew from the Assembly, and left the high Presbyterians to themselves, who agreed, with only one dissenting voice, that Jesus Christ, as king of the Church, hath himself appointed a church government distinct from the civil magistrate."

The Erastian lawyers of our day seem to think, that by confining the declaration, that Christ has appointed a government in his Church, distinct from the civil, in the hands of ecclesiastical office-bearers, to the subject of Church censures, they leave the other departments of Church government, such as the examination, admission, and ordination of ministers, free to be controlled by the superintending authority of the civil power, whereas, if they were acquainted with the history of the Erastian controversy, they would know, that while the Erastians usually denied altogether that Christ had appointed a government in the Church distinct from the civil, they directed their arguments and their efforts *mainly against the right of the ecclesiastical office-bearers to inflict Church censures*, a fact which at once accounts for the connection in the Confession between the great general truth about a distinct government and the subject of Church censures, which is only one of the applications of this truth, and also shows, that the inference which has been deduced from the connection is erroneous. In fact,

the Erastians of those days did not venture to deny, that the ordination of ministers belonged by divine authority to the Church; and when Coleman, the minister referred to in the extract formerly given from Baillie, maintained that Christ had not appointed a distinct government in the Church, and did so chiefly for the purpose of overthrowing the right of Church-officers to inflict censures, Gillespie, who took the leading part in conducting this controversy, pressed him with this objection, that this general proposition would exclude not only suspension from the sacrament and excommunication, but also the ordination and deposition of ministers, except under the control of the civil magistrate; the ordination and deposition of office-bearers being manifestly included in Church government, as well as the suspension and excommunication of ordinary members. And Coleman, in reply, instead of venturing to maintain, that ordination and deposition are subject to the control of the civil magistrate, alleged that ordination did not fall under the head of Church government, but under the "commission of teaching," and so belonged *jure divino* to the Church, even though the doctrine, that Christ had appointed a distinct government in the Church were denied. (Gillespie's *Male Audis*, p. 8, 9.) This reply of Coleman was evidently a mere evasion, but as, on the one hand, Gillespie's objection shows how universally and decidedly it was then held by orthodox divines, that the distinct government which Christ had appointed, comprehended every thing connected with the ordination of office-bearers as well as the infliction of Church censures, so, on the other, Coleman's answer shows very strikingly how impossible the Erastians of those days felt it to be, to give the civil magistrate any control over ordination, even while they subjected to his authority the whole matter of Church censures.

From these facts it is manifest, that the attempt of modern Erastians to confine the great truth embodied in the Confession, and in the statute law of Scotland, that Christ has appointed in his Church a government distinct

from the civil, in the hands of ecclesiastical office-bearers, to the subject of Church censures, is inconsistent with the known principles and objects of those who prepared it; and also, that in order to defend their Erastian views, precluded as they are from denying this great fundamental truth, they are obliged to have recourse to absurdities and extravagancies, of which the more able and learned Erastians of former days would have been ashamed.

The Erastians of former days denied to Church officers only, or chiefly, the power of inflicting Church censures, independently of the control of the civil magistrate, and left them the other powers usually comprehended under the head of Church government, while the more ignorant Erastians of our own day would leave to them only the power of inflicting Church censures independently, and would *subject* their *other* powers of jurisdiction to the superintendence and control of the civil authority. The old Erastians thought that the power of inflicting censures, *i. e.*, of suspending and excluding from ordinances, was almost the only part of the authority usually claimed by ecclesiastical office-bearers, which they could plausibly or successfully assail; and had they been precluded as our modern Erastians are, by the express terms of the Confession, from denying the general principle, that Christ has appointed a distinct government in his Church, and the application of this general principle to the subject of Church censures, they would at once have acknowledged that *a fortiori*, the power of admitting and ordaining ministers belonged exclusively to the Church itself by scriptural authority.

Not only, however, is it certain, that this doctrine of the Confession was intended to be a deliverance on the Erastian controversy in general, and not merely on the subject of Church censures; but the statement itself, as it stands in the Confession and in the Statute Book, plainly does decide, in its fair import and application, all our disputes with Erastians, and lay a firm and sure foundation for all for which the Church of Scotland is at present contending. If Christ, as king and head of his Church,

has appointed therein a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate, it plainly follows, that none without the Church can have any share in this government, or any control over its exercise; that none can administer it but the church officers, into whose hands Christ has put it, that in the exercise of it they are subject and accountable only to him, and that any attempt by other parties than Church officers to assume the administration of this government, or to interfere in regulating its exercise, is an unwarrantable usurpation, a depriving of Church office-bearers of the power and authority which Christ has conferred upon them, an assumption of his supremacy, a perversion of his arrangements. When, then, the Seceders introduced into their formula the position, that this government "is not subordinate to the civil," they were merely explaining and expanding the statement of the Confession, that it is "distinct" from the civil; for if Christ has appointed a Church government distinct from the civil, it is self-evident that the civil magistrate, as such, or in virtue of his office and of the power and authority belonging to it, has no right to interfere in its administration; and that if he does claim any such right, he must found it not upon the power or authority which he is entitled to exercise as civil magistrate, but upon some special and express warrant of Christ himself.

Christ has put the administration of this distinct government into the hand of Church officers, and of them alone, and no others, therefore, unless they can produce an express divine warrant, are entitled to take it into their own hand, or to direct or control his office-bearers in the administration of it. And in exact accordance with this great scriptural principle, the Confession (c. xxiii. s. 3,) declares, that the "civil magistrate may not assume to himself the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven," an expression which comprehends all exercise of church power, all authoritative interference in the administration of ecclesiastical government.

Assuming, then, that the doctrine of the Word of

God, of the Confession of Faith, and consequently of the statute law of Scotland, that the Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate, involves an assertion, that not merely the matter of Church censures, but the whole outward government of the Church, has been authorised and appointed by Christ, and vested by him in ecclesiastical office-bearers, and that, of course, in the administration of this government the civil magistrate has no right authoritatively to interfere, that the conduct of church officers in the exercise of this government, he has no right to order or control; let us proceed to inquire what the administration of this government implies; what it is that church officers, in the exercise of the authority intrusted to them by Christ, are to do; and upon what principles, or by what standard, their conduct in this matter ought to be regulated.

Now, the great general truth upon these points is this, that church officers are in Christ's name, and in accordance with his directions, to manage or transact all the ordinary necessary business of his visible Church. Christ appointed and sent forth men to preach the Gospel, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, as the ordinary and appointed means of conveying to men the spiritual blessings which he died to purchase. All Presbyterians agree in holding, that these ordinances—the public preaching of the Word, and the dispensation of the sacraments—can ordinarily be administered only by ordained ministers of the Gospel, and this power or privilege of the ordained ministers of the Word, is usually called the power of order (*potestas ordinis*). Christ, of course, intended that these ordinances should be administered by ordained pastors in every succeeding age until the end of the world. And, therefore, the first and fundamental part of the ordinary necessary business of his visible Church, must be the appointment from time to time, in all ages, of those persons who are to administer his ordinances. So long as the Church continues, this process of appointing ministers must be constantly going

on. Christ must have had it view, and, accordingly, as we might have expected, he has given us some directions in his Word, as to the way in which ministers should be appointed and set apart to their work, all of which should be faithfully applied and acted on. He has bestowed upon the Christian people, who are his body, and for whose edification the work of the ministry was appointed, a considerable share of influence in the election of those who are to be over them in the Lord, and to watch for their souls, as will be fully proved in the next Lecture of this series. But according to the unanimous opinion of Presbyterians, in opposition to the Independents, the trial of the qualifications of ministers, and their ordination, or solemn setting apart to the pastoral function, forming an essential part of that distinct government which he has appointed in his Church, belong to those who are already church officers. This principle is founded upon the accounts given us in the Book of the Acts of the appointments of different ecclesiastical office-bearers, the directions given to Timothy and Titus about the qualifications and ordination of bishops or pastors, and the fact that Timothy was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery. As this is acknowledged by all Presbyterians, and indeed by all but Independents, we shall not enlarge upon the scriptural proof of it, but assume that the examination and ordination of ministers, being an essential part of church government, a necessary and fundamental branch of the ordinary business that must be transacted in the Christian Church, has been vested by Jesus Christ in his own ecclesiastical office-bearers, and should therefore be managed by them alone, without interference or control from any foreign authority, and in subjection only to Christ himself. The examination and ordination of pastors, including the determination in each particular case of the question, whether a certain individual possesses the necessary scriptural qualifications, and ought to be ordained to the office of the holy ministry, is a part of what is usually called the power of jurisdiction, (*potestas jurisdictionis*;) and it is

a fundamental principle of Presbyterian Church government, that in no instance should any question on this subject be decided by any single man, but only by a plurality of individuals, forming a Church Court, regularly constituted in Christ's name.

Another essential part of the ordinary necessary business of Christ's visible Church, comprehended also under the head of the power of jurisdiction, and, like the former, to be exercised only by courts, and not by individuals, is the right of determining who shall be admitted to partake in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. No one, indeed, has a right to determine what qualifications are necessary for the enjoyment of these privileges except Christ himself, the only head of the Church, and he has determined this in his Word. But from the nature of the case, there must be some provision for applying his directions upon this point to individuals as they may apply for admission. Unless there is to be an indiscriminate admission of all to the sacraments, without any regard to character and qualifications, there must be some party to determine in the case of each individual applying, whether or not he appear to possess the qualifications which Christ in his Word requires, and ought therefore to be admitted to the enjoyment of the ordinances. This is an essential part of church government, a process that must be constantly going on in the management of the affairs of the visible Church. And Presbyterians are unanimous in holding, in opposition to Independents, that the right of determining this in the case of each individual, has been vested by Christ, not in the body of the people, but in regularly constituted Church Courts, composed of ecclesiastical office-bearers. It is on this, indeed, mainly, that the power or authority of the ecclesiastical office-bearers is founded. It rests upon these two propositions, 1st, That it is the bounden duty of all to whom the Gospel is preached, to be baptized, and to commemorate Christ's death. * 2d, That Christ

* It is a curious fact upon this point, that Grotius, perhaps the most illustrious advocate of Erastian principles, that he

has vested in ecclesiastical office-bearers the right of determining, in accordance with directions contained in his Word, all questions as to whether or not men shall be admitted to Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We do not, of course, hold, that men who, through the reading or preaching of the Word, have been led to believe in Christ, will be deprived of the blessings which he purchased for all who receive him, merely because in God's providence they have not had an opportunity of partaking in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or because they have been excluded by unjust and unwarranted decisions of Church Courts, disregarding or violating Christ's directions. But this admission is not in the least inconsistent with the position, that it is the bounden duty of all who have received the truth, to apply to the proper party for admission to these ordinances, and that they cannot disregard or neglect this, if they have opportunity, without sin. Neither is the admission in the least inconsistent with the scriptural principle held by all Presbyterians, that since from the nature of the case, there must be some human and, of course, fallible party to determine all such questions, this power, according to Christ's appointment, is vested in the office-bearers of his Church. Although Church Courts may, from negligence, human infirmity, or the influence of bad and sinful motives, sometimes pronounce unjust and erroneous sentences,

might lay deep the foundations of his system, published a tract, in which he tried to prove that the Lord's Supper might be administered without a pastor, and that men might discharge the duty of commemorating Christ's death without the use of outward symbols. This tract was answered by Petavius, a Papist, by Dodwell, an Episcopalian, and by Cloppenburg, a Presbyterian. It is also deserving of notice, that Tindal subjoined this tract of Grotius to the Defence of his celebrated work, entitled "The Rights of the Christian Church asserted against the Romish and all other priests who claim an independent power over it." Tindal, like most other infidels, thought that all church power was Romish, and like some in our day who are not infidels, he could see no medium between Popish and Erastian views upon this subject.

excluding men from outward ordinances, which Christ, of course, will not ratify in heaven, still they are the party, and the only party, to whom applications for admission to these ordinances should be made, and who are entitled to give a decision upon them. Their liability to err, the probability that they may sometimes pass sentences which Christ will not approve and ratify, does not disprove their competency to entertain and settle these questions. It does not overthrow their legitimate authority. It does not prove that they are not entitled to decide these points. It does not show that there is any other party among men competent to decide, or warranted to control them in the exercise of this function. And the proper and natural effect of an adverse decision by the competent, the only competent party, the party authorised by Christ to settle these points, though, of course, liable to err, should be to lead men to consider very carefully whether they can confidently appeal from this human and fallible tribunal to the only higher authority, that of Christ himself, the only lawgiver, the only king and head of his Church, the sole arbiter of the everlasting destinies of men.

Having thus explained generally what the administration of the distinct government which Christ has appointed in his Church, and vested in church officers, includes or implies, what it is that these church officers in the exercise of their function of government are to do, as comprehending especially the ordination, and of course, if necessary, the deposition of office-bearers, the admission, and of course, if necessary, the exclusion of ordinary members to and from outward ordinances, we would now return for a little to the admission and ordination of ministers, as this bears more immediately upon the present subjects of contention.

Every thing necessarily connected with the examination and admission of ministers, is in its own nature spiritual or ecclesiastical, it forms an essential part of that distinct government which Christ has appointed in his Church, and therefore ought to be regulated and settled

on'y by those who, to use the language of our standards, "have been furnished by Christ with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto." Nothing can be conceived more thoroughly spiritual in its character than the ordination of a pastor to administer Christ's ordinances. In no part of the ordinary business of the visible Church is there a more direct and immediate reference to the authority, the presence, and the agency of him who rules and preserves the Church, who alone has given, and still gives, pastors and teachers for the work of the ministry, and the edification of his body, who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and holds the stars in his right hand.

None are entitled to judge of the question, whether a particular individual is possessed of the necessary qualifications, and ought to be ordained, except those who have already been admitted to bear office in the Church. No civil power can give any man warrant to administer Christ's ordinances, and to bear rule in his house. This must flow from Christ himself, and it can be done rightly and effectually only, in accordance with his directions, by those who have been commissioned and authorised by him for that purpose. So clear and unquestionable is this great principle, that it is still to this day a part of the statute law of Scotland, that "the examination and admission of ministers shall be only in the power of the kirk."

If, then, a court of Christ's Church, constituted and acting in his name, can alone ordain to the office of the holy ministry, they are, of course, bound to decide for themselves, on their own responsibility, and by their own conscientious convictions, whether they will ordain or not. This is manifest even upon the general principles of liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment, independently of any specific appointment of Christ. The power of ordaining to the office of the holy ministry, is a talent which they, and they alone, possess, and for the exercise of which they are responsible, as free and

rational agents. In the employment of this talent, and in the exercise of this power, they are not only entitled, but bound, to be guided by that right of private judgment, which is the inalienable privilege of every intelligent and responsible being, subject in its exercise only to the authority of him, who alone is Lord of the conscience, and alone, therefore, entitled to require men to regulate their opinions and their conduct according to his will.

But independently of this great principle, which, in accordance with the general grounds of moral obligation, precludes Church Courts from ordaining, except where they are conscientiously persuaded that they ought to ordain, they are subject in this whole matter, and in determining every question of this kind, to the authority of Christ, in whose name they act. They are bound to have regard to every intimation of his will applicable to this point, and to all the objects which he has enjoined them to aim at. There are qualifications which he has required of bishops or pastors, of which Church Courts must judge; there are rights which he has conferred upon the Christian people, as to the formation of the pastoral relation, which Church Courts are bound to respect; there are objects pointed out by him, for which the work of the ministry was established, and which in setting apart any man to that work, they are bound to regard. It is their duty to have a supreme and exclusive regard to all these considerations, because Christ requires this at their hands. They are responsible to him, and to him alone, for the decisions to which they may come upon all these matters, and not only has no foreign or civil authority a right to prescribe to them, whether they shall ordain or not, but they are bound to disregard any such interference as a usurpation of Christ's sole headship, an invasion of the rights and liberties of his Church.

In short, it is clear as noonday, that if Civil Courts are entitled to interfere in the way of prescribing or controlling as to the ordination of ministers, they have as good a right, or as the able and learned Erastians of former days thought, a far better right, to interfere in regard to

the admission of ordinary members to the sacraments of the Church. And if the Church were to be guilty of the sin, and to submit to the degradation, of acquiescing in the principles which have been put forth by those who are opposed to her recent proceedings, there would be nothing improbable in ministers and kirk-sessions being soon compelled, under the superintendence of a sheriff's officer, or a macer of the Court of Session, to impart to notorious profligates the symbols of Christ's broken body and shed blood, to the dishonour of the Head of the Church, the profanation of his holy ordinance, and the unspeakable disgust of all his faithful people.

If these principles be well-founded, they form a full vindication of all the recent proceedings of the Church of Scotland. The sum and substance of what she has done is just this: She has resolved that, come what may, she will not grant ordination to the pastoral office, in opposition to her own conscientious convictions as to the duty she owes to Christ and his Church in this matter; and she has applied this principle, by resolving that she will not ordain Mr Young to be minister of Auchterarder, on the ground, that the great body of the people are resolutely opposed to his settlement as their pastor. She has rejected him, on this ground, as not a right and proper person to be ordained minister of Auchterarder, persuaded that in doing so, she was acting according to the mind of Christ, and for the edification of his Church. She has determined that, whatever orders Civil Courts may issue, or to whatever penal consequences she may be exposed, she will not go through the degrading and impious farce of ordaining him minister of a Christian people, who declare that they will not receive him as their pastor; and, by God's grace, she will adhere, at all hazards, to that determination.

When a Church Court is asked to grant ordination to the office of the ministry, in a case where that ministry is to be exercised in a heathen land, or where there is not any formed or organized Church of Christ, then, in deciding the question, whether they will ordain or not,

they are called upon to consider only, whether the individual possesses the general qualifications for being a minister of the Gospel, and the special qualifications for the particular sphere proposed. If they are satisfied that he possesses the necessary qualifications, and is willing to devote himself to this work, then they are warranted in ordaining him. And here we may remark by the way, that trying or examining candidates for the ministry, is as much a spiritual or ecclesiastical matter,—belongs as exclusively to the province of the Church Courts, and should be as free from all civil control, as the ordination itself. The examination and the admission, the trials and the ordination, are indeed parts of a process which is substantially one and the same. A Presbytery is asked to admit a man to the ministry, and as Christ has required certain qualifications, they are bound to proceed to examine, whether he be a person that ought to be admitted or not. Application is made to a Church Court to ordain, and they are bound to take trial of the applicant, that they may decide, as the result of the trial, whether they will ordain or not. The trial or examination is intended solely for the purpose of obtaining materials for enabling them to decide, whether it be right and agreeable to Christ's will that they should ordain, and, therefore, the trial or examination is a necessary part of that branch of Church government which comes under the general head of the admission and ordination of ministers, and should be regulated by the very same principles, and especially by the same exclusion of civil control.

We have made this remark, because some persons have thought that the Church Courts might, in obedience to the Civil Courts, have proceeded to take Mr Young on trials, though not to ordain him. But they would thereby have acknowledged the right of Civil Courts to interfere, to a certain extent, in a matter plainly ecclesiastical, and would also have acted a dishonourable and disingenuous part, unless they really regarded the question of Mr Young's ordination as minister of Auchterarder to be still

open—to be one that might still be decided favourably or unfavourably, according to the result of the trial or examination. The supreme judicatory of the Church did, several years ago, reject Mr Young, as not a fit and proper person to be ordained minister of Auchterarder, avowedly upon the ground, that the great body of the people were opposed to his settlement. The whole claims and pretensions of the Church to independent jurisdiction in spiritual matters, to ecclesiastical authority upon scriptural grounds, are now, therefore, staked upon the validity of that sentence of rejection. And any thing on the part of the Church that seems to imply the possibility of Mr Young being again thought of as possible minister of Auchterarder, must either be a disingenuous profession of what is not seriously contemplated, or else a submission to the claim of the civil power to headship over the Church—a prostration of the powers and prerogatives which Christ has conferred upon his Church and people at the feet of the secular authority.*

But while examining or taking upon trials is thus a necessary part of the general business of the ordination of ministers, to be performed by Church Courts without

* Attempts have been made to mystify this subject, by pressing the distinction between examining or taking on trials, and ordaining or admitting, and by insisting that the statute law imposes the former as a duty upon Church Courts, but not the latter. The truth, however, is, that this distinction has no more foundation in law than it has in reason and common sense. The law is, that the “*examination* and admission of ministers shall be only in the power of the kirk;” and the statutory obligation, both in the act of 1592 and in the act of 1711, is not to take on trial, but to “receive and admit” a qualified presentee. The duty of receiving a presentee is discharged when he is recognised in that character, and any step is taken toward his settlement. The only other duty which the words of the statutes seem to impose, is to “admit” him. But as even the boldest of the Church’s opponents shrink from maintaining, that Church Courts are bound to admit a man in obedience to an order of a Civil Court, they have made a separation between trying and admitting, although this separation has no warrant, either in the reason of the case, or in the law of the land.

foreign interference, on their own responsibility, for the satisfaction of their own consciences, and while in some cases, formerly referred to, the mere examination of the personal qualifications of the applicant, may be quite sufficient to warrant the Church Court to proceed to grant ordination; yet there is usually, as an accompaniment of ordination, or necessarily involved in it, another idea which requires the introduction of other principles, viz., the formation of a pastoral relation between the minister ordained and a particular Christian flock. When we consider the formation of the pastoral relation between a minister and a particular flock, the setting one man as pastor over others in the Lord, we are bound to inquire whether Christ has given the flock any place, standing, or influence in this matter, or has subjected them entirely to the discretionary authority of the Church Courts. Any intimation of his will upon this point, must, of course, be implicitly obeyed. Now, we believe that there are sufficient materials in Scripture, all, of course, given us by Christ for the regulation of our opinions and conduct, to establish the conclusion as a portion of divine truth, that while Church Courts may ordain men upon the ground of merely personal qualifications, so as to make them ministers, and authorise them to dispense the Word and Sacraments, when there is no Christian congregation over which they are to be made overseers, yet, that in the formation of the pastoral relation between a minister and a particular flock, the consent of that flock is necessary, and that therefore Church Courts, in the exercise of their power of ordination and collation, are imperatively required to ascertain and regard this.* The

* This distinction is explicitly recognised by Hooker, in the following remarkable passage in the Seventh Book of his Ecclesiastical Polity: "The power of order I may lawfully receive, without asking leave of any multitude, *but that power I cannot exercise upon any one certain people utterly against their wills*; neither is there in the Church of England, any man, by order of law, possessed with pastoral charge over any parish, but the people, in effect, do chuse him thereunto; for albeit,

scriptural proof of this will be set before you in next Lecture. We have made this passing reference to it, merely to show you how it connects with our present train of argument, and would now only repeat, that if there be any scriptural ground, as we believe there is, for maintaining, that the pastoral relation should be formed only with the consent of both parties, minister and flock, then Church Courts are as imperatively bound, by a regard to the authority of Christ, to have respect to this principle in the exercise of their power of examination, ordination, and admission, as they are to require that every one whom they ordain to the office of the ministry shall be "blameless," "the husband of one wife," "apt to teach," "no striker," "not given to much wine," "not greedy of filthy lucre."

Believing, then, on the authority of Scripture, and of the Confession of Faith, that the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his Church, has therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate, we have explained to you what it is that these Church officers, in the administration of this government, are to do; and we would now advert to the extent of their province, and the sphere within which their authority is to be exercised. Their power and authority is limited, as to its sphere or province, by a regard to the objects for which it was put into their hands. It applies fully to those only who have freely and deliberately become members of the visible Church. The apostles disclaimed all right to judge those who were without; and so should all those who succeed them in the ordinary administration of this government.

The power of Church Courts extends only to ecclesiastical matters, and implies no authority to regulate or

they chuse not by giving every man personally his particular voice, yet can they not say, that they have their pastors violently obtruded upon them, inasmuch as their ancient and original interest therein hath been, by orderly means, derived unto the patron who chuseth for them." Vol. ii. p. 305, of Dobson's edition. Lond. 1825.

determine the civil rights of men. Church Courts have no right to decide any questions concerning the persons and property of men; but all these questions, whomsoever they may affect, must be settled by the ordinary civil tribunals. Ministers are just as much subject to the ordinary civil courts as any other members of society, in regard to every question that concerns their persons and their property; and as we acknowledge the exclusive right of the ordinary civil tribunals to decide every question affecting their persons and property, so we disclaim all right, on the part of Church Courts, to decide any question as to the civil rights of any member of the community. The administration of the Church government which Christ has appointed, in the hands of his office-bearers, extends only to the performance of the ordinary necessary business of his visible Church,—to the doing of those things which must be done if Christ's ordinances are to be administered, and his Church to continue on earth. If these ordinances are to be observed, men must be set apart to administer them, and to determine, also, who are to be admitted to the enjoyment of them. While Christ's Church continues upon earth, these processes must be continually going on. Christ has given directions about them in his Word; and, with these directions, he has intrusted the doing of them to his own office-bearers. Whatever be the outward condition of the Church, this business must be transacted; and it should be transacted only by those who have been commissioned by Christ to do it; and only in accordance with his directions. Whether the Church be countenanced and supported, or merely tolerated,—whether it be protected or persecuted, by the civil authority,—still, ministers must be appointed and ordained, and men admitted to outward ordinances; and all this must be done by Christ's officers, according to his orders. We claim for ecclesiastical office-bearers no right but merely that of doing what must be done wherever the Church exists, and of doing it according to Christ's directions, without the interference of any foreign authority. We claim for our Church

Courts no power or authority but what was enjoyed and exercised by ecclesiastical office-bearers during the first three centuries. We claim nothing but what is enjoyed and exercised at this moment by all the Presbyterian Dissenters amongst us, in perfect consistency with the peace of society and the security of men's civil rights. We claim this, and nothing more,—and we will be satisfied with nothing less. We maintain, that the Church of Christ ought ever to enjoy the same spiritual power and authority which the primitive Church possessed, and which Dissenters now enjoy; and we do so on this ground,—that we know nothing in Scripture to warrant the Christian Church, in any circumstances, or for any reason, to abandon any of the privileges which Christ has conferred, or to neglect any of the duties which he has imposed; and nothing to warrant or entitle civil rulers to claim, in return for their countenance and support, a right to interfere in the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs, or to exercise any authoritative control over Christ's own officers, in the administration of that distinct government which he has put into their hands.

The province, then, within which this government is to be exercised is confined to ecclesiastical matters; and there is no great difficulty in determining what matters are properly and intrinsically ecclesiastical, and what not. Without entering into detail upon this point, we submit the following proposition, which we are confident will commend itself to the understandings of men:—All those things are ecclesiastical, and of course comprehended in the administration of the distinct government vested by Christ in his own officers, which accord with the two following conditions: *1st*, That but for Christ's establishment of his Church on earth, they would not be done at all; and, *2d*, That wherever the Church exists, and in whatever variety of outward circumstances, they must be done, and cannot be dispensed with.

Now, tried by these tests, it is manifest that the ordination of men to preach the Gospel and to administer the sacraments,—the setting one man over others in the

Lord, to feed their souls,—is a matter strictly and properly, in its own nature, ecclesiastical; and, being essential to the existence and efficiency of the Church, in all varieties of outward condition, must have been contemplated by Christ, in the appointment of that distinct government which he has put into the hands of Church officers, and in the administration of which no foreign authority, no civil functionaries, have any right whatever to interfere.

But while we disclaim all right, on the part of Church Courts, to interfere in civil matters, and restrict their authority to ecclesiastical affairs, we think it right to point out a distinction upon this point, the disregard of which has given rise to much ignorant clamour. It is the distinction between the intrinsic nature or primary character of an act, and the consequences which may contingently attach to it. It is said,—You disclaim all interference in civil matters, and yet, in point of fact, you do affect men's civil rights. You refuse to ordain Mr Young minister of Auchterarder, and you *thereby* deprive him of the stipend, manse, and glebe. Is not that an interference with civil rights?

Now, to this we answer,—1st, It is by no means certain that our refusal to ordain Mr Young will deprive him of the temporal emoluments. That question is still in court, and must be decided, of course, like every other civil question, by the ordinary civil tribunal. For any thing we know, the Court of Session may find that Mr Young is entitled to all the emoluments of the benefice, notwithstanding our refusal to ordain; and if they do, we will make no farther opposition to his enjoyment of these emoluments, if his conscience permit him to receive them. 2d, If the loss of the emoluments of the benefice follows from our refusal to ordain, it was not the Church, but the State, that established this connection; it is not the law of the Church, but the law of the land, that produces this consequence. The Court of Session will be very willing to assign to him the civil emoluments, notwithstanding our refusal to ordain, *if the law of the*

land will admit of it; and if the law of the land does not admit of this, that is not the Church's fault,—she did not make the law, and she is not responsible for it.

But, 3d, The conclusive answer to the objection is this,—The right of the Church to decide in this matter depends not on the question, whether, through the intervention of the civil authority, civil interests may, in point of fact, be affected? but on the question, *whether the decision be given upon a point that is in its own nature, and in its proper primary character, civil or ecclesiastical?* The Church's decision was simply a refusal to ordain Mr Young, and to form the pastoral relation between him and the people of Auchterarder. This was a matter in its own nature ecclesiastical. The Church did not step out of her own place to meddle with civil things; she gave a decision upon a point which she was bound to decide, *and could not avoid deciding, in one way or other.* Mr Young's application for ordination came before her, as a matter of course, as a part of the ordinary business of the government which Christ had appointed her to administer. Application was made to her to do what was unquestionably within her sphere, and what she alone was competent to do. In considering how the application was to be disposed of, she was bound, by her allegiance to Him in whose name she acted, to have regard exclusively to his revealed will, and the edification of his body. In deciding the point, she was not called upon, nay, she was not at liberty, to consider how either her own civil interests or those of Mr Young might be affected by it, but simply what was the mind and will of Christ, and what was best fitted to promote the welfare of his Church. She did act upon this principle, and refused to ordain. For the civil consequences that may result from this decision she is not responsible; and by a regard to them she could not, consistently with her duty to Christ, be influenced. If there be civil laws which attach certain civil consequences to decisions of Church Courts, the State, of course, may alter these laws

if it chooses. But whether civil consequences follow or not, the Church Courts are solemnly and unchangeably bound to have respect, in all their decisions, to the revealed will of Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

There is another great scriptural principle with respect to the ecclesiastical authority which Christ has vested in the office-bearers of his Church, the explanation of which will not only tend much to the general illustration of the subject, but contribute also at once to remove objections to the views that have been propounded, and to establish, if possible, more fully the position, that the Church could not have acted otherwise than she has done, in those recent proceedings that have brought upon her so much obloquy, without violating the duty which she owes to her only King and Head:—It is the principle, that all ecclesiastical authority is only ministerial, and not lordly; and this brings us to the consideration of the standard by which Church power ought to be regulated. It may contribute at once to explain the import of this proposition,—that ecclesiastical authority is ministerial, and not lordly,—and to establish its truth, if we advert to some of those scriptural statements that have been usually adduced by orthodox divines in support of it. In the words of the text, as we have already explained them, the apostle distinctly asserts, that he and his fellow-apostles are not lords over the other members of the Church, but servants; that Christ was the only Lord; and that he was equally Lord of the apostles and of the humblest of the ordinary members of the Church. If the apostles were not lords, but acted simply and solely as Christ's ministering servants, delivering his will, and not their own, for the good of the Church, which is his body, surely none who have succeeded them in the administration of the ordinary government of the Christian Church are entitled to proclaim themselves lords, or to lay claim to any thing like a lordly power or authority; that is, a power or right of acting in the administration of Church government according to their own views, as

distinct from what Christ has revealed and prescribed; or according to their own will or discretion, as distinct from his. The same principle is laid down in several other passages in the apostolic epistles. Paul says, 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2, "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful," implying, that they were entitled to do nothing but what their Master authorised and appointed. The same apostle says, 2 Cor. i. 24, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy;" a statement plainly implying, that, even in matters of revelation, although men were, in point of fact, bound to receive implicitly what the apostles taught, yet that this was not because of any power or authority which they possessed, but merely because they were fully accredited, as the inspired messengers of Christ's will. They required men to receive what they preached, just upon the same principle on which ministers among ourselves, in publicly reading the inspired Scriptures, are warranted to call upon their hearers to receive it not as the word of men, but of God.

In like manner, the Apostle Peter, (1 Pet. v. 1, 3,) after virtually disclaiming for himself lordship over presbyters, by calling himself their co-presbyter, enjoins them to act not as being "lords over God's heritage, but examples to the flock;" a statement which shows, that when the apostles, as the administrators of Church government, disclaimed lordship, this was intended to express not merely their entire subjection, in all that they did as ecclesiastical office-bearers, to the authority of Christ, but likewise to limit or define the extent of that authority which they were entitled to exercise over the ordinary members of the Church. These ordinary members of the flock are all entitled to the free exercise of the right of private judgment on every thing connected with their personal salvation,—a right which they must exercise upon their own responsibility, subject only to him who is Lord of the conscience. Christ has also given to his

people a high place and standing in his visible Church; he has conferred upon them important rights, which the office-bearers of the Church are as much called upon to respect, in the exercise of the power and authority committed to them, as any thing else which he has prescribed. And by these great principles of the right of private judgment,—the inalienable birth-right of intelligent and responsible beings,—and the standing and privileges which Christ has conferred upon the members of his body, must the ecclesiastical office-bearers limit the exercise of their authority, if they would not be guilty of the sin of lording it over God's heritage.

It is declared, in the Confession of Faith, (c. xxxi. s. 3,) "That it belongeth to Synods and Councils" (composed, of course, of Church officers) "ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience." They are to determine controverted points of faith and practice, but only *ministerially*; that is, only by declaring what Christ has already determined in his Word upon these points, and not as if they had a right to settle them by any power or authority of their own,—as if any discretion were left to them in these matters, or as if any obligation lay upon men's consciences to submit to their decisions upon those points, except in so far as they are warranted and authorised by the written Word. "It belongeth also," the same authority declares, "to Synods and Councils (*i. e.*, to superior Church Courts) to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God and government of the Church." But then this *diatactic* power of Church Courts, as it is usually called, to set down rules and directions, is, according to the general opinion of orthodox Presbyterian divines, limited by these important principles,—1st, That the things about which rules and directions are to be set down be things which, *as to the substance of them*, are required or authorised by Christ in his Word, in the worship and government of his Church. 2d, That the rules and directions extend only to the *mode of doing* those things which Christ in his

Word requires to be done, but the mode of doing which he has not determined; and that they be all directed to the one object of securing that these “things be done decently and in order,” and be necessary for securing that end. 3d, That the rules and directions prescribed by Church Courts for securing that the things which Christ has required to be done, but the mode of doing which he has not determined, “be done decently and in order,” *do not of themselves bind the consciences of the members of the Church*, so that the mere neglect or disregard of them necessarily involves sin, and affords ground for inflicting the highest ecclesiastical censures. It is the general doctrine of Presbyterian divines, that the neglect or disregard of any rules or directions prescribed by Church Courts, even in accordance with the preceding limitations, but not directly authorised by the written Word,—does not afford, of itself, ground for inflicting the highest censures of the Church,—that it affords ground for such sentences only when it implies scandal, or manifests a contumacious disposition; *i. e.*, when it does not proceed from a reasonable or probable scruple of conscience, but from a desire to produce confusion and disturbance,—to display disrespect and contempt of ecclesiastical authority, or to overthrow the foundations of Church power,—a state of mind which is in itself sinful, and, when openly exhibited in conduct, affords sufficient ground for deposing an office-bearer, and excommunicating an ordinary member.

The next clause in the section of the Confession to which we have referred,—declaring, “That it belongs to Synods and Councils to receive complaints in cases of mal-administration, and authoritatively to determine the same,”—refers not to the general powers competent to Church Courts, simply as such, but to the subordination of Courts; *i. e.*, the right of superior Church Courts to receive and determine appeals from inferior ones. This is one of the points of controversy between Presbyterians and Independents, and does not belong to our present subject. The concluding sentence in the section, how-

ever, states admirably both the legitimate authority of Church Courts, and its scriptural character, as ministerial and not lordly. It is in these words :—“ Which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word.”

This general principle applies to all the sentences of Church Courts, in determining controverted points of faith and practice (usually called *potestas dogmatica*),—in setting down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of the Church (*potestas diatactica*),—and in deciding all particular cases of discipline connected with the infliction or remission of church censures (*potestas diacritica*). It plainly declares, that the authority of Church Courts is an ordinance of God, appointed in his Word; and that, therefore, their decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission. This is founded upon the scriptural principles, that Christ has appointed a distinct government in his Church; that he has vested the administration of this government in church officers, assembled in regularly constituted Church Courts; that he has authorised them to entertain and decide certain species of questions; and that he has imposed, by express scriptural precepts, the general duty of obedience and submission on the ordinary members of the Church, requiring them to obey those that bear rule and are over them in the Lord. This general duty of obedience, however, imposed by Christ upon the ordinary members of the Church, is not absolute and unlimited, any more than the obedience resulting from any other relation subsisting among men,—the obedience due by children to parents, by servants to masters, by subjects to civil rulers. It is qualified and limited, not only by the great paramount obligation applicable to all relative duties, that we must obey God rather than man, but also by the kind of sub-

jects to which it extends, and the objects for the promotion of which the correlative authority was bestowed, and to which, consequently, its exercise ought to be directed. These decrees and determinations are to be received with reverence and submission, "if consonant to the Word of God;" and, whether they be consonant to the Word of God or not, men must of course decide for themselves, in the exercise of their own responsibility, and in obedience to the express injunction of God, "to prove all things," and "to try the spirits." If they are consonant to the Word of God, then they are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made; men being bound to show their respect for God's ordinance, by having regard to the fact that these decrees and determinations are made in the lawful exercise of a power or authority which God has appointed, and by cherishing those feelings of reverence and submission which this consideration is fitted to call forth.

Church power or ecclesiastical authority is then wholly ministerial, Church Courts being, in every exercise of their power, in all their decrees and determinations, to have regard to Christ's revealed will; to keep within the province which he has prescribed to them; to require nothing to be believed which he has not revealed; to require nothing to be done which he has not imposed; and to inflict the highest censures of the Church for nothing but what is directly, or by plain implication, a transgression of his revealed will. They are bound to have supreme and exclusive regard, in all their decisions, to all the directions which he has given, to all the qualifications which he has prescribed, and to all the rights and privileges which he has conferred upon his people. There is no room left for the exercise of an arbitrary discretion,—for the enforcing of their own notions, for the gratifying of their own inclinations, for the promoting of their own ends,—as distinguished from what Christ has revealed, prescribed, or required them to aim at. To attempt any thing of this sort, would be to act,

not as ministers or stewards, but as lords. Civil rulers have, indeed, a lordly authority in their province, which comprehends every thing connected with the persons and the property of men; but that of ecclesiastical rulers is only ministerial. Our Saviour himself has clearly marked this distinction, where he says: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." Matt. xx. 25-27. Civil rulers, *i. e.*, legislators,—for to them only, properly speaking, does the principle apply,—do exercise, and are entitled to exercise, dominion and authority; *i. e.*, it is lawful and competent for them, in subordination to the glory of God, the welfare of the community, and a respect to any statements of God's Word that may happen to apply to the particular subject, to exercise some measure of discretion in making laws, in altering or modifying these laws as they may think fit, and in enforcing obedience and submission to their enactments. Ecclesiastical rulers have not, properly speaking, any discretion. The constitution and laws of Christ's kingdom are already fully settled and determined by him in his own Word. They have no right to make laws, but merely to administer and execute those which Christ has appointed; and it is their very glory and honour, the source and ground of their true dignity, that their authority is only ministerial—that they are just the servants and stewards of Christ—and the servants of his people, for Jesus' sake. Civil rulers may ordinarily legislate in the way they, in the exercise of their own judgment, think best fitted to promote the glory of God and the welfare of the community, provided no objection can be brought from the Word of God against their proposed enactments; whereas ecclesiastical rulers are wholly limited in the exercise of their authority by the written Word, and should have positive warrant and direct authority from Scripture for their decrees and determinations.

The assumption and exercise of a lordly authority in the Church, of a right to impose articles of faith and ceremonies of worship, and to inflict the highest censures of the Church, without scriptural warrant and authority, form one of the leading features of the Papal apostasy, the man of sin and son of perdition; and, although Protestants, asserting the supreme and exclusive authority of Christ as the lawgiver and head of his Church, and the right of private judgment, have generally contended that church power or ecclesiastical authority is only ministerial and not lordly, yet some Protestant Churches have failed in making a full and faithful application of this principle. We regard the power claimed and exercised by the Church of England, "to decree rites and ceremonies," to be an unwarrantable assumption of lordly authority. We consider it an interference with Christ's sole supremacy and with the liberties of his people, to require that the Lord's Supper shall be received only in a kneeling posture—the example of our Saviour plainly indicating that it ought to be received in the ordinary posture commonly used at meals. We regard it as a lording over Christ's heritage to intrude a minister upon a Christian people against their will. Our Church, indeed, is not responsible for the principle of intrusion, for it is expressly condemned in her constitutional standards; but our Church Courts, in former days, were guilty of many scandalous intrusions. The possibility of intrusion has been, we trust, conclusively prevented by the veto law; and, while our determination to adhere to the principle of that law rests mainly on the grounds, that the intrusion of a minister upon a Christian people, in the full enjoyment of Christian privileges, is opposed to the revealed will of Christ, the liberties of his people, and the right of private judgment, that determination is confirmed by the conviction, that the right of the Church Courts to retain the power of intruding, if they see cause,—and this is the sum and substance of what our opponents contend for,—can be defended only on principles which would vindicate the lordship assumed over God's heritage by that apostate

church, which exalteth itself against Christ and all that is called God.

The elucidation given of this great principle, that Church power is purely ministerial and not lordly, will tend, we trust, to remove any prejudices that might be entertained against the claim of Church Courts to independent and exclusive jurisdiction in all ecclesiastical affairs, and show that it interferes neither with the sole supremacy of Christ as the only lawgiver and head of his Church, nor with the privileges and liberties which he has conferred upon his people, and the right of private judgment which they all enjoy as intelligent and responsible beings.

This great principle also lays a clear and firm foundation for certain important practical conclusions, bearing immediately upon the present subjects of contention, and fully establishing, not only that the Church did right in all that she has recently done; but, further, that she could not have acted otherwise, without being guilty of a heinous violation of the duty which she owes to the Lord Jesus Christ. These conclusions are indeed deducible, with sufficient clearness, from the general truth already illustrated, as taught in the Confession of Faith, that Christ has appointed in his Church a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate; but they come out, perhaps, still more palpably, as corollaries from the position that the power or authority implied in the administration of this government is only ministerial and not lordly, while, at the same time, when viewed in this connection, they strikingly illustrate this interesting consideration, that it is the real honour and dignity of Church Courts that their power or authority is ministerial.

These practical conclusions are chiefly two:—1st, That, in the administration of Church government, or in pronouncing decisions upon ecclesiastical affairs, *Church Courts not only are not bound, but are not at liberty to obey the orders or directions of any civil or foreign authority*; and, 2d, *That, to their decrees and determi-*

nations, they are warranted and called upon to apply the principle, that we must obey God rather than man, and, on this principle, to adhere to them at all hazards.

1st. If Christ has appointed a distinct government in his Church, and if the authority with which he has invested ecclesiastical office-bearers for the administration of this government be purely ministerial, then it follows that, in judicially regulating ecclesiastical affairs, these office-bearers are not at liberty to obey the orders or directions of any civil authority. Christ is the only law-giver and ruler of his Church. Its constitution and laws he has already settled and determined in his Word. He has given no authority to his office-bearers to make laws. They are as much bound by the laws which he has made and promulgated as the ordinary members of the Church. He has given them no discretionary jurisdiction, but, as they meet and act in his name, he has required them to have exclusive regard, in all they do or determine, to his own revealed will. He has empowered none but his own officers to administer the government of his Church, and any attempt of a party unauthorised by him to interfere in this matter, is a usurpation of his own supremacy, an interference with his prescribed arrangements. If Christ had given to his officers a lordly authority, if he had left to them any discretionary jurisdiction in the government of the Church, they might, perhaps, have been warranted in delegating a share of their authority to others, or been at liberty to let others exercise some control over them in these matters. But their authority being only ministerial, they are bound to adhere rigidly, and in all respects, to their Master's arrangements. They are "stewards of the mysteries of God;" and as "it is required in stewards," as the apostle says, "that a man be found faithful," and as it would be glaring and manifest unfaithfulness in a steward to obey any orders connected with the management of his master's estate which did not proceed from his master, or from some one having his master's commission, so it is plainly unfaithfulness in Church Courts, and in direct contravention to the nature

of their office, the duties which it imposes, and their whole relation to their Master, to receive and obey orders or directions from any who have not Christ's commission to interfere. A proprietor may give commission to a friend or relative to manage his estate in his absence with the same lordly authority which he himself possesses ; and, in such a case, the commissioner may take what advice, or follow what directions he thinks fit. But the authority of Church Courts being only ministerial, their duty is exactly like that of stewards, who have nothing to do but to follow their Master's directions, and who would be plainly guilty of unfaithfulness and disobedience, if they paid any attention whatever to any orders which did not come directly or indirectly from him.

Civil rulers are guilty of sin when they presume to interfere authoritatively in the administration of Church government, comprehending every thing connected with the management of the ordinary necessary business of the visible Church, and including the ordination and deposition of office-bearers, and the admission and excommunication of ordinary members. When they attempt this, they step beyond their province,—they usurp a power which they do not lawfully possess,—they interfere with arrangements which Christ has made,—they set themselves in opposition to his declared will. And as they commit sin in attempting to exercise such an authority, and to assume such a control, so ecclesiastical rulers are guilty of sin if they submit to the dictation of Civil Courts in ecclesiastical matters, or pay any regard to their orders. One is their Master, even Christ, and him alone should they obey. All the proceedings of Church Courts, constituted in Christ's name, must be conducted in his name ; and in regard to all the ecclesiastical matters that come before them, and on which they are called upon to pronounce judgment, the one sole standard by which they are bound to regulate their opinions and their conduct, is the revealed will of their Master, as to the principles by which they ought to be guided, and the objects which they ought to aim at. If they adopt any

other standard, this is virtually to assume to themselves a lordly authority, as if they were not servants and stewards, but left to their own discretion, or it is to put some foreign power in that place of authority which Christ has reserved to himself. On every point which comes before them for decision, the one single desire of their hearts should be to ascertain what is the mind and will of Christ upon the matter. All their prayers and all their exertions should be directed to the discovery of this, and when they have made up their mind upon this point, then they are bound simply to obey and execute their Master's will, *by a weight of obligation which transcends every other, and necessarily excludes all regard to any thing else.*

And as Church Courts are thus precluded from paying any regard to the orders of the civil power, in determining how they will exercise the ministerial and stewardly power with which Christ has invested them, so, of course, they are also precluded from cancelling or reversing their own decisions by any regard to the will or authority of others. Their decisions upon all ecclesiastical matters that come before them are, or should be, just the applications of Christ's revealed will to the circumstances of the particular case. If their prayers for divine guidance and direction have been heard and answered,—in other words, if their decision was a right one, then they were shut up to adopt it,—they were obeying Christ's will in pronouncing it. They would have been guilty of sin if they had not pronounced it, or if they had adopted an opposite decision. This being the case, it is plain that they cannot cancel or reverse any of their decisions upon any ground, except a conscientious conviction that, when they pronounced them, they had mistaken the mind and will of Christ. Church Courts knowing that their authority is only ministerial, virtually declare in every decision they pronounce, "This appears to us the mind and will of Christ upon the matter. We are bound by our allegiance to him to give this decision, and we would be acting inconsistently with our duty to him if we gave

an opposite one." And, therefore, if they cancel or reverse any decision which they have once given, this implies a distinct profession, either that they have now come to take a different view of the mind and will of Christ upon the subject, which of course they cannot profess unless it be true, or else that they do not intend to regard the mind and will of Christ in the matter, but to regulate their conduct by another standard, or by subjecting themselves to a different authority.

2d. The second practical conclusion flowing from the great truth that Church power or Ecclesiastical authority is not lordly but ministerial, is, that Church Courts are entitled and bound to apply to their decrees and determinations, the principle that we must obey God rather than man; and on the ground of this principle, to adhere to them at all hazards. This is so obviously involved in what has been illustrated under the former head, that it is unnecessary to dwell upon it. When Church Courts, in their judicial capacity, pronounce decisions upon ecclesiastical matters, they are not merely administering or executing Christ's laws, they are also obeying them. They are just doing, in each case, if their decisions are well founded, what Christ has not only authorised but required them to do. They should pronounce no judicial decisions in Christ's name, except upon points, the adjudication of which they cannot avoid, if they would discharge aright the duties which he has imposed upon them. They should pronounce no decisions upon these points, except such as they believe his revealed will requires them to adopt. If, in any of their decisions, they either disregard his will, or through negligence or worse motives, and perverting passions, or prejudices, mistake it, they are guilty of sin; and whenever they are convinced of this, are bound to confess and repent, to change their mind, and adopt a different course. But if their decision was a right one, then they were obeying the will of Christ in adopting it, they are doing what he, in the circumstances, required of them; and if they had either failed to pronounce it, or pronounced an opposite judgment, they must have dis-

obeyed him, and been guilty of sin. Many of the decisions of Church Courts are, from the nature of the case, complicated with matters of fact, and questions of evidence, which must be judged of upon the ordinary grounds applicable to such points. But if their power be ministerial, then, to all their decisions involving any principle, the statements we have just made obviously apply. In pronouncing them, they have been obeying Christ, they have been only doing what he required at their hands. They could not have decided in an opposite way without being guilty of disobedience and sin. It would still be sin in them to adopt a different course of procedure, and, therefore, they must adhere to their own decisions, whatever other authority may interfere with an opposite decree; and to whatever painful consequences their steadfastness may expose them. However high may be the authority that may require them to cancel or reverse their judgment, it cannot be equal to that of Him in whose name they acted, and in obedience to whose will they adopt it; and the full and sufficient answer to all such demands, on the part of any civil or foreign authority, is, "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts v. 29.)

The application of these two conclusions to the recent proceedings, and present duty of the Church, is very obvious. When the Church, in passing the veto law, determined that no minister should be intruded upon any congregation contrary to their will, and that the dissent of a majority of male heads of families, communicants, should be a sufficient ground for setting aside the presentee, she was not only giving effect to a fundamental principle of her own constitutional standards, but determining in accordance with the mind and will of Christ, who has given us in his Word sufficient materials for believing that the pastoral relation should be formed only with the consent of both parties. In resolving to be guided by this principle in the exercise of her own undoubted power of ordination and admission, she merely resolved to follow so far the will of Christ in this matter; to do what he required of her; to have regard to the

edification of his body. She was not making an arbitrary law of her own, on merely human and rational grounds, —she was declaring what she believed to be the law of Christ, and pledging herself to act upon it.

If Christ has given to Church Courts a right to intrude a minister upon a Christian people against their will, then, of course, they are bound to retain and to exercise this right. But, if he has given them no such right, and if, on the contrary, he has given them sufficient materials for concluding that ministers should not be intruded, then they are guilty of disobedience and sin if they disregard or overlook this principle in the exercise of their power of ordaining and admitting.

If any man can convince the Church that Christ has given her courts a right to intrude ministers upon reclaiming congregations, she will confess her error, rescind her veto law, and resume the old practice of intrusion. But, believing it to be Christ's will that intrusion should not be practised, she cannot rescind a law which is merely, so far as it goes, a declaration of Christ's will, and cast herself loose from the restraints which it imposes. The civil authority may take a different view of this matter, and order her to rescind her law, and to change her practice, as has, indeed, virtually been done; but she cannot change on any such ground. She cannot acknowledge the right of the civil authority to interfere in the regulation of a matter so purely ecclesiastical. The order of the Civil Court carries no conviction to her understanding and her conscience. It cannot, of course, change her mind, and what she has once resolved upon as required by the will of Christ, she cannot abandon or disregard on any ground, except a conscientious persuasion that she has mistaken the mind of Christ. If this law is to be rescinded in obedience to a Civil Court, without any regard to what we still believe to be the mind of Christ, then we ask, where is this interference to end? May not all our laws be rescinded on the same or similar grounds? And is not this virtually to ascribe to the civil power that lordly authority over the Church which

ecclesiastical courts are bound to disclaim for themselves, and which the Word of God ascribes to Christ alone?

The Church having pledged herself by the veto law to be guided in the formation of the pastoral relation by a regard to the consent, tacit or express, of the Christian people, because she believed that to be in accordance with the mind of Christ, acted upon this principle in the case of Auchterarder, and refused to ordain Mr Young to the pastoral charge of that parish, on the ground that the great body of the people decidedly opposed his settlement as their minister. And the Civil Courts now require that she shall reverse this decision, take Mr Young on trials, with a view to ordaining him, if he be found qualified, minister of Auchterarder, notwithstanding the opposition of the great body of the people! To obey such an order would be plainly to cast off the authority of Christ, and to exalt the civil power to his throne. It would be a virtual acknowledgment that a civil tribunal, which "Christ has not furnished with gifts for government, nor with a commission to execute the same," is entitled to bear rule in his Church, to regulate and determine ecclesiastical affairs, to exercise a power and control in spiritual matters, *superior to that which Christ has vested in his own office-bearers.*

And, independently of this general ground, which would make it an act of sin to pay regard to such an interference of the civil authority, it must be kept in mind that, when the Church refused to ordain and admit Mr Young to be minister of Auchterarder, she did what she believed, and still believes, to have been accordant with the will of Christ. She believed, and still believes, that she would sin against Christ were she to pretend to form the pastoral relation between him and a Christian people decidedly opposed to his settlement among them. Let her be convinced that, in pronouncing that decision, rejecting Mr Young, she has sinned, and then she will repent and change, but not till then. The order of the Civil Court carries no such conviction with it; and, therefore, she cannot, consistently with her duty to Christ, allow it to influence her conduct. She will

adhere, at all hazards, to her decided refusal to ordain Mr Young minister of Auchterarder. Whatever authority may be alleged in opposition to that judgment, she still believes that she has the authority of Christ in support of it, and she must, therefore, adhere to it, whatever consequences may follow. It would be a falsehood were she now to profess that she mistook the mind of Christ when she rejected Mr Young. It would be to sin against Christ to declare that she does not regard his will in this matter. *But a profession of one or other of these positions is necessarily involved in cancelling or reversing that sentence, which, therefore, would be manifestly sinful.* She may suffer, but she will not sin. She may expose herself to the loss of many temporal advantages, but her integrity to Christ she will hold fast. She will not let it go. Mr Young may, by a sentence of the Civil Court, get the temporalities of the benefice, but, while the people of Auchterarder are opposed to his settlement as their minister, *he will not be ordained to the pastoral care of their souls.*

We have now given an imperfect outline of this important and extensive subject. Setting out with the great truth contained in the Confession of Faith, and founded on clear Scriptural warrants, that “the Lord Jesus, as King and Head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate,” we have proved to you that this doctrine applies not only to the subject of Church censures, but to the management or regulation of all the affairs of the visible Church, and that it necessarily implies that, in the administration of every part of this distinct government, the control of any foreign or civil authority, of any authority but Christ’s over his office, is excluded. We have showed that the administration of this distinct government, or the management of the ordinary necessary business of the visible Church, comprehends every thing connected with the ordination and deposition of office-bearers, and the admission and excommunication

of ordinary members; that, upon Scriptural principles, and by the concession of all the most learned Erastians of former days, the ordination and admission of ministers is at least as thoroughly sacred and as purely ecclesiastical in its nature, as the infliction or remission of censures, and should therefore be, at least, as thoroughly exempt from civil control; that this department of Church government comprehends the trial of candidates, and usually also, the formation of a pastoral relation to a particular flock, as well as mere ordination to the ministry; and that there are directions given upon all these points in Scripture, by which, and by which alone, Church Courts ought to be guided in the exercise of this power. To guard against the idea that we were disposed to set up Church Courts, in the exercise of a despotic power or tyranny, and to prove that we claim for them nothing but what is quite consistent with the sole supremacy of Christ, the paramount authority of his Word, and the rights and liberties of his people, we have explained the great Scriptural truth, that all this power is only ministerial or stewardly, and not lordly or discretionary; and that while on the one hand, all their decrees and determinations, must be regulated by a regard to Christ's revealed will, yet, on the other hand, this Scriptural principle clearly excludes all civil interference with their decisions on ecclesiastical matters, requires of them to disregard all such interference, to disobey all such orders, and to adhere to their own conscientious convictions, as to the mind and will of Christ, and the path of their duty, whatever dangers or persecutions may arise because of the same.

If these principles, which we have endeavoured to establish, be well-founded, then it must be manifest that they at once afford a full vindication of all the recent proceedings and present claims of the Church of Scotland, and also, mark out distinctly the course which she is solemnly bound to follow. And, therefore, we are fully entitled to expect and to demand that the opponents of the Church will either meet them fairly, and refute them on Scriptural grounds, or else confess that the Church could

not have adopted a course substantially different from that which she has pursued, without virtually declaring that she would not have Christ to reign over her, without selling her birthright for a mess of pottage, and sinking into the sinful degrading condition of being a mere tool or slave of the civil power.

THE END.

